

[William and Corneal Jackson]

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William and Corneal Jackson (Negro)

214 Eaton Park.

Lakeland, Florida

(Phosphate Miner)

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WILLIAM AND CORNEAL JACKSON

At [Eaton?] Park, six miles from Lakeland, Florida, off the Bartow road #2 and across from the Ruth Alderman Airport, I found the Negro quarters of the Southern Phosphate Corporation. At one time this section of the country was the heart of the mining activities, but now operations are located at Sand Gully, beginning on the outskirts of South Lakeland.

Situated in the center of the high mounds left by the process of phosphate mining, and partially surrounded by miniature lakes made by these same excavations, were 28 houses, including one for single men. Similar in construction, painted white and trimmed in green, they faced both sides of the road entering the quarters.

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Guarding the main entrance off road #2 were two filling stations. Behind the one to the right was a small weatherboarded building, harmoniously painted white and green and serving the dual purpose of school and church. A small space of ground on the south side of the school was used as a playground. Near the front door a heavy piece of iron was suspended between two posts. When struck it resounded loudly, calling children and adults alike. The interior of this building was not ceiled. The blackboards, made from painted beaver-board, were nailed to the walls. The teacher, Smith McFall, used a homemade desk and bench. The day of my visit she had borrowed a chair to use, stating that the bench made her back tired when 2 she had to sit on it all day. She pointed out that even the rickety chair was wired together.

Down the road from the school, men and women [loitered?] in the sun before the doors of their quarters talking and laughing. Other women were bent busily over wash tubs, while their men sat nearby or cleaned and trimmed lawns. One man burned dead grass off a small plot in preparation to making a garden. The sound of chattering tongues filled the air. One woman who bent over her wash tub gossiped with a neighbor on a front porch across the road. When my husband came in this [?] he had changed his color." This brought hoots of laughter. he was sitting by her side when she called to her friend, and I noticed that his complexion was as dark as it had ever been. Later I discovered that the men had been called out the night before to stand in water as they mended a 12 inch water line, a possible reason for his color condition.

Then the woman across the road looked up, placed her hands on her hips and yelled: "Child, my back is so stiff from pickin dem strawberries. If I could catch Polly (meaning the belita) I wouldn't pick another berry." This brought more laughter. Then I heard the washer-woman exclaim: "Great Lawd! I thought I was washin a table cloth. Bless goodness, if dis here woman ain't gone and tuk a table cloth and made a dress out of it." This brought the other women clustering about, including her friend from across the way. Exclamations were made and opinions passed concerning the idea and color of the dress in question.

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Then I heard the woman who was washing say: "My husband better not buy me no table cloth, or I'se gwine to do that same trick. Dis here white woman has gone and larn me somethin."

Further along the road I observed several men around a Model-A Ford 3 so I stopped to talk with them. I asked for William Jackson whom I wanted to see, and they told me he was under the car fixing the front spring. From his position, he yelled up that he would be out as soon as he finished.

He emerged in a few minutes, and as he lived diagonally across the road from where he was working, he invited me to the house to talk and visit.

When we arrived at the little, weather-board quarter house, William called his wife Corneal, and introduced us. Like William she was small in stature, but I found her pleasant and neatly dressed.

Inside the house she invited me to come in the kitchen where she was busy making a house coat, adding that she had moved her sewing machine in there to be near the warmth of the kitchen stove. She proudly showed me the pattern she was copying from a catalog, and held up the bright material for me to admire.

"This will be pretty when it's finished," she said. "You see it calls for 16 gores in the skirt?"

William excused himself, after heating a bucket of water by submerging an electric heater in the bucket for five minutes, and retired to the next room to take a bath. Corneal explained that bathing was accomplished in a galvanized tub because they didn't have a bathroom.

While we were waiting for William to finish, I explained to Corneal the reason for my visit, and as her how she learn to sew so well. She said: "My mother was a seamstress, and when I was small I started to sew. Later on in life after I finished the grammar school I

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worked for Mr. Adderly, who ran a tailoring establishment on North Florida Avenue in Lakeland. There I learned how to tailor under his instructions, and now I make nearly all the clothes for the neighbors here in the quarters, and 4 sometimes for the people in Lakeland. Oh! I like to sew and make pretty things.”

As Corneal talked I noticed that her brogue was the of a Nassau native, and I ask her where she was from; she told me Key West, which explained the matter, as many Key West Negroes are emigrants from Nassau.

“You see, I was born in [Koy??], February 17, 1908. My mother, you know her? Mary Ellen Wallace, well she's seventy years old now. Then there is my sisters, [Blonova?], Flossie, [Elvita?], and [Mercedes?], the latter was taken into the family when she was four years old. [Blonova?], she works in a dress factory in New York City. Flossie is a nurse in the Morrell Hospital in Lakeland. [Elveta?] is a student at Tuskegee Institute, in Tuskegee, [Alabama?]. And Mercedes is in the eleventh grade at the Washington Park High School in Lakeland. I have two brothers, [Leanrod?], who lives in Washington, D.C.[md]I don't know what he's doing there. Then there is [Elmore O?]. who works in the Dietitian Department at the Colored Veterans Hospital, Tuskegee, Alabama. Now don't you think I should be proud of my family?

[“Father?”] has been dead some time now, but all of us childrens have looked after mother and we own our own home on Orange Street in Lakeland.

A call from the front room interrupted Corneal. William had finished his bath and wanted me to relate his life history. Corneal followed me into the front room, bringing her sewing along. She seated herself on a bench in front of the dresser while William talked.

I was born November 28, 1903 at Ocala, Florida. My parents names 5 was [E?]. J. and Corine Jackson. My father came from [ueonsboro?], Mississippi and my mother from Arlington, Georgia. My father was a turpentine worker in his early days, but later began preaching and selling. Father is dead, and my mother lives with us. Mother is now 70

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years old, but very active for her age. She use to work hard too, takin in washin's and workin for private families. She can't do any of that kind of work now. Right now she's visitin friends in [Medulla?], Florida.

"My parents left [Ocala?] when I was between two and three year old. They first moved to Orlando and afterwards went from place to place, wherever they could find work to do.

"I have two sisters, Rosa Lee Boone, age [30?], she has two childrens, H. J. and [Reva?]. Rosa Lee lives in Mulberry, Florida. I think her husband works for WPA. Lillian Melton, my other sister lives in Gainesville, Florida and she is 33 years old. She is separated from her husband, [Daniel?]. Who works out in private families.

"I work hard to take care of my wife and mother, and we all gets along nicely together. My wife understands me and I understand her. You see if we don't agree, I will get another woman. There are too many women in the world who would want a good working man." Corneal, who was still seated on the bench before the dresser, looked up with a sharp eye, while William continued: "You see this is my third wife, but I'm not going to tell you anything about the other two.

"I think that a home should be the first thing in a man's mind, although I don't own my own home. But I don't never worry too much about it because like it says in the Bible, 'first seek yo the Kingdom of Heaven, and everything shall be added unto you,' and that's what I do. I've owned 6 about six cars though, during my life time, a Buick, Studebaker, Dodge, and all the rest was Fords, from Model-T to Model-[A?]. I can't afford no car now.

"But to git back where I was in the first place. I attended school from 1910 to 1920 at Medulla, Mulberry, Lakeland, and [the t?.] [?] Industrial School at Rockcastle, Virginia. I only attended the latter for one semester. I had to quit school on account of finances. I had to assist my mother and father. My father was hurt in a car wreck while going from work on a truck, from [Eaton?] Park to Medulla, when this part of the country was mined for [phosphate?]. Since his death I try to keep up with my books by studying at home. Once I

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wanted to be a dentist, but now I would get lots of joy out of teachin the Bible. I study my Bible every day, along with my English books. In fact I have tried to learn some of all kinds of work, I have even tried salesmanship. You see, my wife is a good seamstress, and I try to keep up with her.

“Life is not worth anything without education. The schools of today are better than those we had. The families who keeps their children out of school should be punished.

“When I first started to work in 1916 I only worked three months out of the year. The rest of the time I spent in school. The first company I worked for was the Phosphate Mining Company. They're out of business now. My first work was carrying water. The second year I worked in the pit as a flunky. While working in the pit I had a chance to operate on electric motor and later I operated a switch board. At that time I was makin \$5.25 a day.

“I have worked steady since 1920 with the Southern Phosphate Corporation.

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My first work with this company was a pipe fitter. This job paid me \$2.50 a day. My next promotion was to a [lineman helper?]. I left that job and got another promotion as a nozzle man, this job paid [\$4.08?] a day.

“In 1926 I changed jobs and worked an auction tender in the phosphate pit; there I also fired locomotives and learned a great deal about Diesel engines. In fact I've also learned a great deal about dragline machines, they're used to dig top soil off the phosphate. I've also worked in the table plant too. The table plant is used for gettin the finest [pebble?] off, and there is suppose to be nothin left when they finish.

“Hydraulic pressure is used for mining phosphate, it is passed through the nozzle at the pressure from 150 to 200 pounds, according to the size of the pipes, which are operated by electricity. They use to use steam. [At?] present I am a nozzle man[;?] my salary is

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30¢ per hour for eight hours work, making [\$2.40?] a day. We only work four days a week which gives me \$9.60.”

“You see,” piped Corneal, “we sure have to scrape and it's the bills that face us.”

William continued with the description of his work and the phosphate minings “The water pipe from the hydraulic station to [th?] it is twenty-four inches in diameter; when it reaches that pit it is eight inches, and when it passes through the nozzle it is one-half to two inches. This pressure is used to tear down the banks of phosphate. [Whwn?] a bank is washed down by pressure it passes through a ditch to the well. There, it is sucked up through a suction pipe twelve inches in diameter. This suction is propelled by a 250 to 300 H. [P?]. electric motor. From there it passes through the discharge to the washer and falls in a tub.

“It passes from the tub into a log with sharp prongs on it, and through the log to what you call a hardening mill. There the rock is taken by the elevator into a wet tank and loaded out of the wet tank into [gondolas?], 8 and the [gondolas?] carry it to the drying plant. In the drying plant it is dried on [roasters?]. From the roasters it is carried into the drying bin, thence to the phosphate [?] used in shipping the rock, and at last it moved to the nearest [?] part, usually Tampa. Once there, it is dumped into pits, then taken by elevators to various ships in which it is transported to different countries or to home parts.

“There is a gang of men called the floating gang, they set up the equipment for mining. Then the pit crew comes along and they do the mining. They work on three shifts of eight hours each. Each shift consists of the foreman, nozzle-man, and four flunkies. They transports us from the operators to the pit and lack in company trucks, so we don't have to worry about that.

“Since they have learned to mine in the modern way, the work is much easier on the man, it eliminate the strain on man power. They also try to make everything soft for the employees. The majority of the companies have good living quarters and good sanitary

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conditions. Ant the [general?] run of the man in our quarters ar community minded, each worker trying to look out for the other fellow while on the job.

“What worried me is, my income don't meet my bills. It keeps me below a decent standard of livin. I have insurance to pay in [Eaton?] Park each month for Corneal and mother, which amounts to \$2.00. Then there is my furniture bill, which is \$6.00 a month, and as we're tryin to buy that sewin machine, it's another [\$3.50?] on the month. Whenever we go to town our transportation costs 50¢ round trip, which would be \$1.00 for both of us to go and come back. Our food averages from \$16.00 to \$18.00 a month. For a while I bought food out of the company store and we'd average 9 about \$9.00 a week. Next we have to buy wood which costs \$3.00 a strand, and a strand only last one month. So you can see how it goes.”

Corneal reached in the drawer of a nearby chest and handed me the card system used in paying off the employees of the phosphate company. It read as follows:

No [O?] 1101

This check must be enclosed with signature (a mark) of payee.

Wages period ending 9-15-38.

Deductions

Old Age Benefit \$00.28

Store \$16.68

Rent \$ 2.25

Insurance \$00.60

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Total

\$19.81

Employees Memorandum - Detach before using check.

Social Security Number - 261-09-9719.

When I had finished my inspection of this card, William resumed his story: "I would like to venture out into a new field of work, but under present conditions I can't go out and find anything. I have seen other jobs that I wanted though.

"My main objection on this job is low pay and injury to my health. Another thing is, that if I'm not properly clad while on the job I'm liable to catch cold and then get pneumonia. Changin shifts and workin in water cause a man to take medicine to keep his system in order. I was sick a 10 few years ago , and had to be taken to the Morrell Hospital in Lakeland. We owe them \$150.00 for hospital and doctor bill yet. As a rule I keep in good health though and I have myself looked over once a year. Mother is in good health too, as is Corneal, but one never knows."

"I had weak eyes when I was little," said Corneal, "but they got all right after a bit and I never even had to wear glasses. My sewin so much don't hurt them neither."

"At the present," William continued, "we have a kind boss-man, but the life that I am living keeps a man in action all the time and it gets kind of tiresome. I would rather live in town if a worthwhile job could be found. It would also be more convenient for the family.

"As for the votin question, I aint doin any votin. I like the present administration because the colored people have been more benefited by it than any other. Of course President Lincoln will always go down in history, but if the next president will be as favorable for Negroes as President Roosevelt is, it will be all right.

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“When I first moved to [Eaton?] Park in December of 1927, there was only one church here, and it was the Freewill Baptist Church. Since then there has been another added, the [AME?] Methodist Church. But when I first come here I wanted to be under the shelter of a church, so I joined the Baptist, I go nearly every Sunday and through the week. My church donations amounts to around \$2 or \$3 a month. Corneal, she belongs to the Foster Memorial [ME?] Church in Lakeland. But my devotion for the church don't keep me from likin all kinds of games, especially baseball, croquet, and basketball.

“Well Mister, I gotta be goin. I have to go in to Lakeland over 11 afternoon for the high school childrens of my neighbors, as I'm the one who takes them back and to. Then, as I have to be on the job from eleven tonight until seven tomorrow morning I'd better be on my way. Corneal will show you around the house, so you can see for yourself what we have got and what we ain't got. By-the-way, before I forget it, remember, they aint a soul in these whole quarters that's on relief, now ain't that somethin!?”

With that, William Jackson bid me goodbye, invited me to come again and was gone. Corneal told me afterwards, that even when he was off work and not sleeping, he liked to work around the house, as he didn't have much use for lazy people. She then gave me time to view their three room home. When I came in I had noticed that there was very little space between the quarter-houses. A few shrubs had been planted in the front yard and were covered to keep out the frost. On the front porch were several old chairs, a few broken and unpainted.

Inside, the room were small and unfinished. The front room was lined with torn, corrugated boxes. The furniture consisted of one bed, a dresser, a chest of drawers, a large chair, one chest covered with [cretonne?], and a steamer trunk. The floor was covered with a rug and on top of this were a number of throw rugs.

In the middle room was a single bed, two throw rugs, two trunks, a settee, one large armchair, and in two corners were home-made closets covered with cretonne curtains.

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[Shades?] and curtains hung at the windows. Corneal was pleased with her small home and proudly pointed out the finer articles.

“I keep the sewin machine in this room,” she said, and showed me how 12 easy the newer models were to move about, as compared to the old style on wooden rollers.

Then we were once more in the kitchen, much of which I had already noted. Like the rest of the house, it was clean and mostly arranged. The wood stove serves for cooking as well as heating. The breakfast set was placed near the prettily curtained windows. The small sink also had a cretonne curtain falling from around its base. Running water is supplied by the company. Over the sink were shelves built for dishes. To one side was a cretonne covered box which housed cooking utensils. The floor was covered with brightly checked linoleum.

Near the back of the house was a well-built sanitary closet. The floors were of [cement?] and a modern toilet had been installed.

Corneal also pointed out her small garden, stating: “I'd like to have a larger garden where I could plant more things. We have collards and [rutabagas?], but I'd like to have a big place for flowers, and more things to eat. You know, the reason I'd like to have a bigger garden is, that we don't have any too much to eat. Anyway it ain't enough to keep up the physical strength in William, and he works so hard. We make the money stretch jest as far as we can, but it won't go no farther. We like grits, bacon, and [meats?], along with plenty of vegetables. We also likes some can goods now and then. For myself, I like pies, pudding, cakes, orange juice, grapefruit, and pineapple juice, but they ain't much chance for it. But William, he jest don't make enough, yet I reckons we oughta be satisfied.”